

Ture Solander

In the short history of video animation the Swedish artists TURE SJOLANDER and BROR WIKSTROM are the pioneers. Their television art programme 'TIME' (1965 - 1966) seems to be the first distortion of video-scan-line rasters achieved by applying tones from wave form generators.

For almost ten years they have been using electronic image-making equipment for a non-traditional statement. It must be kept in mind, however that SJOLANDER and WIKSTROM have a traditional and solid artistic background. Howard Klein likens the relationship between the video artist and his hardware to that between Ingres and the graphite pencil. It should be added that real artists like SJOLANDER and WIKSTROM have a natural relationship to any image-making equipment. In that respect they differ from most cameramen and tape makers and they may come back some day as pioneers in other fields of art.

In fact they have already surpassed the limits of video and TV using the electronic hardware to produce pictures which can be applied as prints, wall paintings and tapestries.

They have generously provided new possibilities to other artists, they are not working alone on a monument of their own.

It is significant that the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts has decided to support SJOLANDER and WIKSTROM financially.

Professor Dr. Bjorn Hallstrom
Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Art.
Stockholm - 1976

Fahlstrom about Sjolander - 1961

We live at a time when borders between the art forms are constantly being redrawn or abolished. Poets arrange their poems as pictorial compositions or record spoken sequences of sound which can hardly be distinguished from musique concrète. Composers are able to build a complete composition around the manipulation of a spoken voice. Artists sometimes create pictures by striking off newspaper photographs or mixing conglomerates of discarded objects and painted areas into something which is neither picture nor sculpture. Puppet theatre is performed by setting mobiles in motion in the constantly changing light effects on a stage.

The border between photography and painting is no longer clear, either, and it is easy to understand why this is so. Tinguély, the creator of mobiles, started out by making a form of reliefs with moving parts, powered by a machine placed at the back of them. After a while Tinguély began to wonder why he could not equally well show the play of cog wheels and driving belts at the rear and let "machine" and "shapes" become a united whole.

Similarly, some photographers have asked themselves why the action of light on photo paper and the development baths could not become a creative process comparable with the exposure of a motif — why camera work and darkroom work could not become one.

Among those photographers we find Ture Sjölander. Among those photographic artists, as he calls them, who feel dissatisfied with the dialectic of the traditional photographer's relationship to his motif: when he searches for his motif, he is the sovereign master of it, choosing and rejecting it —. At the very moment that he touches the trigger, he has become enslaved to the motif, without any possibility (other than in terms of light gradation) to do what a painter does — reshape, exclude, and emphasize in the motif.

This subjection to the motif does not have to be disrupted by eliminating the motif. The photographer simply needs to remove the limits to what is permitted and what is not allowed. To let the copy of a photo remain in the water bath for an hour is allowed (if you want to keep the motif). But leaving it there for a couple of days is the right thing as well (if you want to let the motif diffuse into deformations soft and silky as fur). Scratching with a needle or a razor blade is making accidents with scratches into a virtue — and so on.

In addition, there is the chance of manipulating a figurative or non-figurative motif by copying different pictorial elements into it, by enlargements which elevate previously imperceptible structures to the visible level, even up to monumental dimensions. The tension between scratching lines of light into a developed (black) negative the size of a matchbox and enlarging it on the Agfa papers the size of a bed sheet. This is where the photographer has at his command tricks of his art which the painter lacks, or at any rate seldom uses.

But on the other hand, is the photographer able freely to experiment with the colour? Yes, he is — if he brushes paint on to the negative and makes a colour copy.

He may also, like Ture Sjölander, brush, pour, draw etc. on a photo paper — possibly with a background copied on to it — with water, developing or fixing sodium thiosulphite solutions, ferrocyanide of potassium and other liquids. In that case the result is a single, once-only, art work. In this way he is able to achieve a tempered and melting colour scale of white, sepia, ochre, thunder cloud grey, verdigris, silver and possibly also certain blue and red tones.

In this area, however, it seems everything still remains to be done — but one single photographer's resources are not enough for the experiments to be conducted widely and in depth. Sweden has recently inaugurated its first studio of electronic music. When will photographers and painters be given the opportunity to explore this no-man's-land between their time-honoured frontlines?

But can photography, in principle, be equal to painting? Is not the glossy, non-handmade character of the photo an obstacle? People have argued in a similar way about enamel work, but that technique is now recognised as totally and completely of a kind with the painted picture. If we adjust the focus of the “conventional painting concept” when we are looking at photo painting, we will perchance discover that in its singular immaterial quality it can possess new

and suggestive value.

Öyvind Fahlström
Stockholm, 1961.
Translation from Swedish by Birgitta Sharpe

T I M E

“VIDEOART” ELECTRONIC PAINTINGS - TELEVISED 1966 - 1967 - 1969.

1965.”The role of Photography” Commissioned by the National Swedish Television year 1964.
B/w. Multimedia/electronic experiment. 30 minutes.

1966.”TIME” - b/w, Commissioned by the National Swedish Television. Electronic paintings televised in September 1966. 30 minutes. A video synthesizer was temporarily built, in spite of the TV-technicians apprehension. (Same technical system was later used to create MONUMENT one year later, 1967.) See letters from RUTT ELECTROPHYSICS, NY, USA dated March 12, 1974, below *. In principle this process is similar to methods used by Nam June Paik and others, same years later. Rutt&Etra . Nam June Paik visited Elektronmusic Studion in Stockholm July/August 1966 , during the Festival; “Visions of Now”. Static pictures from TIME was demonstrated for Paik at this point in time. Parts of “TIME” was planned to be send via satellite to New York, but the American participants, pulled out. “TIME” is the very first 'videoart'-work televised as an ultimate exhibition/installation statement, televised at that point in 'time' for the reason to produce an historical record as well as an evidence of 'original' visual free art, made with the electronic medium - manipulation of the electronic signal - and 'exhibited/installed through the television, televised. The work was commenced early 1966. Painting on canvass and paper was made from the static material, in silk-screen prints, for a large numbers of Fine Arts Galleries and Museums 1966, ironically in a 'limited edition', signed and numbered.

1967.”MONUMENT” - b/w. Electronic paintings televised in 5 European Nations; France, Italy, Sweden, Germany and Switzerland, 1968. Monument reached an audience of more than 150 miljon. The work surpassed the limits of “videoart” - a word first used in the beginning of 1970 - 73 - and was developed into an extended communication project, multimedia artwork including creation of tapestries, silk/screen prints, poster, LP/Record Music, paintings on canvass, and a book among other thing, exhibited in several international Fine Arts Galleries. 1968. See text on site from; Gene Youngbloods book “Expanded Cinema”. 1970.

1969.”SPACE IN THE BRAIN” - 30 minutes. First colour electronic original painting where the electronic signal where manipulated. Described in media as a Space Opera. Based on authentic material delivered from NASA. Space in the Brain was a creation dealing with the ; space out there - the space in our brains and the electronic space. (in television) Contemporary to Clarke's 2001, except that the Picture it self was scrutinized and focused, in Space in the Brain. The Static

material from the electronic paintings was worked out into other medias and materials, as in "TIME" and "MONUMENT", see above.

1970. A bestseller posters was produced, worldwide distributed. Scan-Décor Upsala. LP/Record named: "Man at the Moon". Televised 1969, weeks after the Moonlanding. Commissioned by National Swedish Television

Letter from: RUTT ELECTROPHYSICS, 21-29 West 4th Street, New York, N.Y., 10012.
March 12, 1974.

Signed by Sherman Price.

To: International Section of Swedish National Television, Stockholm, Sweden.

Extracts;

I am writing a detailed magazine article about the history of video animation.

From literature available I gather that a videofilm program, "MONUMENT", broadcast in Stockholm in January, 1968, was the first distortion of video scan-line rasters achieved by applying tones from wave form generators.

This is of such great importance - historically - that I would like to obtain more detailed documentation of the program and of the electronic circuitry employed to manipulate the video images.

I understand from your New York office that there may have been a brochure or booklet published about the program.

I will be happy to pay any expense for publications, photocopies or other documents about the program and its production - particularly with regard to the method of modulating the deflection voltage in the flying-spot telecine used.

"Video synthesis" is becoming a prominent technique in TV production here in the United States, and I think it will be interesting to give credit to your broadcasting system and personal for achieving this historic innovation.

Letter from the Manager of THE PINK FLOYD.
Stockholm, September 11th 1967.

Dear Messrs Sjolander & Weck,

Having seen your interesting Stockholm exhibition of portraits of the King of Sweden made with advanced electronic techniques I have been struck by the connection between this new type of image creating and the music-and-light art presented by The Pink Floyd.

I think that your work could and should be linked with the music of The Pink Floyd in a television production, and I would like to suggest that we start arranging the practical details for such a production immediately. With all his experiences from filming in the USA and elsewhere I also feel that Mr. Lars Swanberg is the ideal man to help us make the film.

Please get in touch as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Andrew King

Monument
KRISTIAN ROMARE
Art Writer

The following text was written by the Swedish Art Writer KRISTIAN ROMARE 1968.

MONUMENT electronic painting 1968 by TURE SJOLANDER/LARS WECK

We create pictures. We form conceptions of all the objects of our experience. When talking to each other our conversation emerges in the form of descriptions. In that way we understand one another.

Instantaneous communication in all directions. Our world in television! The world in image and the image in the world: at the same moment, in the consciousness and in the eyes of millions.

The true multi-images is not substance but process-interplay between people.

“Photography freed us from old concepts”, said the artist Matisse. For the first time it showed us the object freed from emotion.

Likewise satellites showed us for the first time the image of the earth from the outside. Art

abandoned representation for the transformational and constructional process of depiction, and Marcel Duchamp shifted our attention to the image-observer relation.

That, too, was perhaps like viewing a planet from the outside. Meta-art: observing art from the outside. That awareness has been driven further. The function of an artist is more and more becoming like that of a creative revisor, investigator and transformer of communication and our awareness of them.

Multi-art was an attempt to widen the circulation of artist's individual pictures. But a radical multi-art should not, of course, stop the mass production of works of art: it should proceed towards an artistic development of the mass-image.

MONUMENT is such a step. What has compelled TURE SJOLANDER and LARS WECK is not so much a technical curiosity as a need to develop a widened, pictorially communicative awareness.

They can advance the effort further in other directions. But here they have manipulated the electronic transformations of the telecine and the identifications triggered in us by well-known faces, our monuments. They are focal points. Every translation influences our perception. In our vision the optical image is rectified by inversion. The electronic translation represented by the television image contains numerous deformations, which the technicians with their instruments and the viewers by adjusting their sets usually collaborate in rendering unnoticeable.

MONUMENT makes these visible, uses them as instruments, renders the television image itself visible in a new way. And suddenly there is an image-generator, which - fully exploited - would be able to fill galleries and supply entire pattern factories with fantastic visual abstractions and ornaments.

Utterly beyond human imagination.

SJOLANDER and WECK have made silkscreen pictures from film frames. These stills are visual. But with television, screen images move and effect us as mimics, gestures, convulsions. With remarkable pleasure we sense pulse and breathing in the electronic movement. The images become irradiated reliefs and contours, ever changing as they are traced by the electronic finger of the telecine.

With their production, MONUMENT, SJOLANDER and WECK have demonstrated what has also been maintained by Marshall McLuhan: that the medium of television is tactile and sculptural.

The Foundation for MONUMENT was the fact that television, as no other medium, draws the viewers into an intimate co-creativity. A maximum of identification - the Swedish King, The Beatles, Chaplin, Picasso, Hitler etc, - and a maximum of deformation.

A language that engages our total instinct for abstraction and recognition.

Vital and new graphic communication. A television Art.

Kristian Romare, Sweden 1968

(from the book MONUMENT)